Week 3 Presentation Notes: Rorty on Pragmatism, Truth, and Antirepresentationalism

Plan for Week 3:

Session in 5 parts:

- A: Introduction on Pragmatism
- B: The Radicality of Rorty's Promiscuous Antibifurcationism
- C: Truth
- D: Representation
- E: Rorty's development to pragmatism: An Arc of Thought

Principal lessons to be learned (see below):

- 1. (From the discussion of truth as "what is best in the way of belief" as opposed to correspondence with reality): How the combination of *declarativism* (blurring out all distinctions of kind of claimable) and *expressivism* (a *local* expressivism about what one is *doing* in attributing truth—namely not *describing* the claimable, but *endorsing* it—underwriting a *global* antirepresentationalism because of special properties of the vocabulary of truth) together underwrite a Jamesean understanding of truth-talk. (This role for an expressivist move in a pragmatist argument forges an important link between the first and the second halves of this course.)
- 2. (From the discussion of representation): that what is *really* at stake in the battle between a *representational* model of the content of expressions and a *pragmatist* model is the best order of explanation (a way of thinking about conceptual priority) between *representational* relations and *reason* relations (of implication and incompatibility). Davidson teaches us that and how taking reason relations as primary (the pragmatists says, because giving and assessing reasons, implicitly and practically appealing to justificatory reason relations, specifiable in a deontic normative vocabulary of "commitment" and "entitlement") *holistically* determines representational relations in top-down explanatory stories. Representationalists are committed to *atomistic* objective usually causal relations (specifiable in an alethic modal vocabulary) determine reason relations.

The issues Rorty raises in the essays we read for this week will be with us for the rest of the course.

Today I want to put the claims central to his pragmatism on the table, and to begin to look at the concepts (vocabulary) and arguments that he deploys in defense of them.

If what he says makes you angry, good: you just found a topic for your term paper! [\$\dagger\$ my history with RR.]

We get to use Rorty's *final* drafts as the *rough* drafts from which we try to figure out how best to express and develop his ideas: what he was *trying* to say and *should* have said, given his insights.

"The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did. Precisely, and **they are what we know**." **T.S. Eliot**.

A) Introduction on Pragmatism:

1. The Deweyan distinction:

Platonism vs. pragmatism: Principles vs. practices. *Theoria* vs. *phronesis*. Knowing *that* vs. knowing how.

Platonists look for a principle or rule, something explicit or that could be made explicit, behind every implicit propriety of practice.

Pragmatists argue that explicit principles or theories float on a vast sea of implicit practical skills. In the Wittgensteinian version, arguing that *interpreting*, *understanding*, or *applying* rules, principles, or theories *itself* requires a distinctive kind of practical skill.

2. Vocabularies (for, inter alia, describing).

Say something here about the Quinean antecedents of **the 'vocabulary' vocabulary**, as a successor to talk of languages or theories (meaning vs. belief).

This is the very first distinction Rorty will deny. (See (B) below on more.) It occupies a special methodological place. For he employs the 'vocabulary' vocabulary to describe discursive practices generally.

1. A *lot* of PRI can be read as invoking only *Carnapian* pragmatism: pragmatism about the choice of *language*, while accepting representationalism for *theoretical* questions *within* the language. Read this way, RR is pointing out that many claims are really about which concepts we should use, and not just about how to use an agreed-upon set.

Read this way, RR is using and depending on the language/theory distinction that he takes Quine to have demolished, and whose demolition motivates Rorty's use of "vocabulary." We could compare this to his use in *PMN* of Kant's cause/reason distinction (quid facti/quid juris), distinguishing the study of the causal processes of acquiring knowledge from the epistemic assessment of the credentials of claims to knowledge, in attacking neokantian representationalism.

It would be disappointing if RR were espousing only a Carnapian pragmatism and backsliding on Quine's TDE argument.

But a more charitable reading is available. It is that he talks in the Carnapian mode just to soften us up for his more radical, thoroughgoing pragmatism.

That will urge that issues of what vocabulary to use are *always* in play, at least potentially, and that there are essentially *no* questions just about proper use of agreed-upon vocabulary. Such issues involving *no* even potential change of meaning arise only at the asymptotic margins of discursive practice.

On this view, mature sciences struggle constantly to provide and maintain discursive environments that are artificial and extreme, like clean rooms, where "normal science" can be pursued, and issues of *changing* the meaning of the terms can be kept at bay or banished out of doors. Success is never guaranteed or fully and permanently possible. But a good approximation can be maintained temporarily, by using heroic social disciplinary measures. But it would be a serious mistake to take this extreme, artificial case to be the paradigm on the basis of which we understand the use of language in general. (Here we might think of Heidegger on the effort it takes to precipitate *Vorhandenheit* out of *Zuhandenheit*.)

Rorty says:

"On the pragmatist account, a criterion (what follows from the axioms, what the needle points to, what the statute says) is a criterion because some particular social practice needs to block the road of inquiry, halt the regress of interpretations, in order to get something done. So rigorous argumentation-the practice which is made-possible by agreement on criteria, on stopping-places is no more *generally* desirable than blocking the road of inquiry is generally desirable.

It is something which it is convenient to have if you can get it. if the purposes you are engaged in fulfilling can be specified pretty clearly in advance (e.g., finding out how an enzyme functions, preventing violence in the streets, proving theorems), then you *can* get it.

If they are *not* (as in the search for a just society, the resolution of a moral dilemma, the choice of a symbol of ultimate concern, the quest for a "postmodernist" sensibility), then you probably cannot, and you should not try for it.

If what you are interested in is *philosophy*, *you certainly* will not get it -for one of the things which the various vocabularies for describing things differ about is the purpose of describing things. The philosopher will not want to beg the question between these various descriptions in advance." [CP 30]

Introduce here what Rorty takes to be a central, governing fallacy: quantifying over all possible vocabularies. He insists that this is not a determinate or determinable domain. (Cf. Wittgenstein on the protean plasticity of discursive practice.)

- 1. Built on the basic concept of <u>vocabulary</u> are two others: <u>conversation</u> and <u>redescription</u>. Pragmatists follow Hegel in saying that "philosophy is its time grasped in thought." Anti-pragmatists follow Plato in striving for an escape from conversation to something atemporal which lies in the background of all possible conversations. [PRI 737]
- 2. The overarching use he makes of **conversation** is to distinguish his two traditions as those whose ideal is to *continue* conversation (for its own sake) and those whose ideal, the point of what we are doing, is to *end* it, or *make it unnecessary*.

Socrates is the avatar of the first, and *Plato*, with his distinctive reading of what Socrates was doing, is the avatar of the other.

3. These concepts are intimately, but unobviously (not transparently) connected. But I think the one that goes deeper is the one RR will exploit in CIS: <u>vocabulary</u>.

The ultimate issue, I think, is whether one can make sense of the idea of *quantifying over all possible vocabularies*.

The key inderlying, related, concept is **redescription**.

What a new vocabulary allows one to do is to *redescribe* things.

The process that produces redescriptions, and so new vocabularies, is *conversation*.

Minor qualification: But one can do other things with vocabularies than use them to describe. So "redescription," though evocative, might be replaced by "recharacterization," or "reconceptualization."

Whatever terminology one chooses here should be generic across referring and predicating. And one of the temptations is to think that referring is independent of predicating, or that in denying that one is denying that referring is not the same as predicating. This is another, now subsentential, sort of holism.

All these holisms: of sense/reference (this one), of senses to other senses, and of semantic

All these holisms: of sense/reference (this one), of senses to other senses, and of semantic theories of senses to epistemic theories of commitments, are ultimately implied by a pragmatist insistence on the conceptual-explanatory priority of practices to content: the idea that content is determined by functional role in practices (of giving and assessing reasons).

4. I think one central issue can be redescribed (!) as between controversies conducted *within* an agreed upon vocabulary and conversation that addresses *change* of vocabulary.

The deep lesson Quine taught in TDE is that these cannot be separated, Carnap-wise.

Traditional, Platonic, epistemologically-centered philosophy is the search for such procedures. It is the search for a way in which one can avoid the need for conversation and deliberation and simply tick off the way things are....

by confronting an object and responding to it as programmed. This urge to substitute *theoria* for *phronesis...* [PRI 724] Descriptivism, as conniving at the search from rules or principles (not merely muddling through with practices) to avoid conversation. Conversation here always includes the possibility of *changing* (both altering and developing) vocabularies.

- 5. So the three key concepts so far are: **conversation**, **vocabulary**, **redescription**.
- 6. Some connections among these concepts are:
- a) RR metaphilosophically divides traditions as
 - i. those that have as their ideal *continuing* the conversation, and
 - ii. those that have as their ideal being able to *end* it.
- b) Change of vocabularies is "redescription."
- c) Conversations involve *change* of vocabularies ("redescription"), not just working within vocabularies.

- d) There is no well-defined *totality* of *all possible vocabularies*, specifiable in advance. This is Rorty's version of Wittgenstein's plasticity-of-language argument for the unsystematic, unsurveyable character of discursive practice and functional roles expressions can play in it.
- 7. The idea seems to be that vocabularies include norms for what is a reason for what, whereas change of vocabularies does not include such overarching norms.

This is basically Carnap's idea: the one that Quine is supposed to have put paid to. If redescription, change of vocabularies, is subject *only* to the norms of utility, or—not the same thing—social norms of "what one's fellows let one get away with" (call those "Twitter norms") then (all the consequences of pragmatism [what exactly?]) follow.

8. Kinds of *facts* are individuated by the *vocabularies* they are specified in.

Physical facts are those specifiable in the vocabulary of physics.

Normative facts are specifiable using normative vocabulary, and stated in declarative sentences whose utterances are normative assertions.

Ditto for nautical facts, culinary facts, theological facts, astrological facts....

So one can't quantify over all the *facts* either.

Cf. Tractatus 1.11:

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being all the facts. That they are *all* the facts is both absolutely essential to *TLP* and completely unsayable (unpicturable) in it. What do you mean "*all* the facts"? That *there exist no others*. But are not given the expressive resources to understand such negative existentials—the kind of *fact* they would be stating, what would *make them true*.

9. Rorty has another term that is part of the constellation that starts with "vocabulary" and includes "redescription" and "conversation." It is "**coping**." It is his generic term for what we *do* with vocabularies, generally. It is in terms of *success at coping* that we are able *sometimes* to *assess* and *compare* vocabularies as better and worse. In that regard, it plays a role analogous to the notion of <u>accuracy of representation</u>, that Rorty wants to persuade us to discard as specifying the dimension along which arbitrary vocabularies can be assessed as better or worse.

The general rubric for the nature of the standard of normative assessment of vocabularies is "coping." It is crucial to this notion of <u>coping</u> that standards for it are rigorously *internal* to the vocabularies being assessed.

[My suggestion is that retrospective assessments can be constrained by prospective assessments that count as "technological" just in virtue of being constrained by forward-looking assessments.]

I'll consider further along what "coping" looks like when we think of it as involving assessments made from *within* vocabularies. My suggestion as to where we end up is that assessments of skillfulness of coping are internal to Davisonian interpretations of others as minded: language-using believers, by mapping of what they are doing onto what *we* are doing. Here the *triangulation* aspect of interpretation is important.

Representation vs. coping. The latter is an embodied, embedded, enactive, broadly ecological notion.

Can invoke representations as part of a causal explanation of how a certain coping strategy works, and why it is as effective as it is (and no more).

But that is *in principle* independent of and irrelevant to the *normative* issues of the *justification* of stances one adopts, of one's *entitlements* to *commitments*, which is what matter for assessments of knowledge, understanding, and discursive situation generally.

It is essential to RR to deny the language/theory (meaning/belief) distinctions, so to talk of 'vocabularies' (I'm happy to use 'idiom' here, too) rather than 'languages' or 'theories'.

But it seems he places a lot of weight on, and cannot do without, the cause/reason distinction, or the description-explanation/justification distinction: the distinction between what is expressed in an *alethic modal* vocabulary and what is expressed in a *deontic normative* vocabulary.

This is Kant's fundamental distinction (addressed particularly to Locke), as RR has emphasized in his discussion of Locke and Kant in Ch. 3 of *PMN*.

It is at least ironic that RR uses this Kantian distinction as one of his central and indispensable conceptual tools in combatting Kant and his neokantian legacy in philosophy.

I want to come back to this notion of <u>coping</u>, in connection with the discussion of Davidson at the end of Part Four of my remarks, ((D), on Representation).

B) The Radicality of Rorty's Promiscuous Antibifurcationism:

("Bifurcation" is Huw Price's term for the principal challenge he makes to merely *local* expressivisms—as we shall see in a few weeks.)

Slogan:

RR criticizes Dewey for wanting to "use the term 'experience' as an incantatory device to blur every conceivable distinction."

I am, in effect, attributing to Rorty the aspiration to do the same thing—though he uses 'vocabulary' (and sometimes 'practice') for that purpose.

(Use Rorty quotes from the readings and articulate and emphasize just how radical this view is.) In the service of (under the spell of?) his antirepresentationalism, Rorty wants to deny *all distinctions* of kinds of truth between vocabularies.)

1. RR is claiming that there are *no* deep, large, or important semantic or epistemological distinctions between the uses of vocabulary in the natural sciences and literature, or between description of facts and statements of values.

So a second characterization of pragmatism might go like this: there is no epistemological difference between truth about what ought to be and truth about what is, nor any metaphysical difference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science. [PRI 723]

By an antirepresentationalist account I mean one which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality. These papers argue that such an account makes it unnecessary to draw Dilthey-like distinctions between explaining "hard" phenomena and interpreting "soft" ones. They offer an account of inquiry which recognizes sociological, but not epistemological, differences between such disciplinary matrices as theoretical physics and literary criticism. [AEL 3]

Pragmatism cuts across this transcendental/empirical distinction by questioning the common presupposition that there is an invidious distinction to be drawn between kinds of truths. For the pragmatist, true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry what sort of reality, if any, a given sentence corresponds to -no need to worry about what "makes" it true. [CP 4]

Davidson's holism and coherentism shows how language looks once we get rid of the central presupposition of Philosophy: that true sentences divide into an upper and a lower division-the sentences which correspond to something and those which are "true" only by courtesy or convention. [CP 6]

Both [Dewey and Heidegger] abhor the notion that poetry is supposed to offer us "values" as opposed to something else, "fact" which we are to find in science. Both regard the fact-value distinction as springing from, and as dangerous as, the subject-object distinction. Heidegger thinks that the whole notion of "values" is an awkward attempt by the metaphysician to supply an additional Vorhanden in order to make good the deficiency left by thinking of Being as idea or as Vorstellung--an afterthought "necessary to round out the ontology of the world. [Overcoming Tradition 292]

Dewey wants the tradition overcome by blurring all the distinctions it has drawn... In particular, Dewey wants the distinctions between science, and philosophy to be rubbed out, and replaced with an uncontroversial notion of intelligence trying to solve problems provide meaning. [Overcoming Tradition 301]

As far as philosophical theory (semantics, epistemology) is concerned with truth and representation, fundamental physics, geology, economics, political theory, law, and literary assessments all go in the same box.

This is *promiscuous antibifurcationism*.

2. Rorty announced at the beginning that he wanted to deny the *Geisteswissenschaften/Naturwissenschaften* distinction.

But I am understanding him as using Kant's causes-reasons distinction to do that. But that distinction is precisely what underwrites the idea of two methodologically different kinds of discipline: one that addresses things that can talk (and their texts, and everything that essentially depends on them), the discursively articulated world of norms, and the other the non-us stuff whose antics do *not* (by and large) depend on how we talk. I think this is a good and important distinction, and suspect that Rorty has indeed gone astray here. On the other hand,

denying this methodological distinction (even if doing so in terms of the conditions of "determinacy" is not a great strategy) might be just the core radical idea RR most wants to develop here.

- 3. Rorty is here expressing a sentiment-impulse akin to that animating Wittgenstein, who, as a result, hovers over everything Rorty writes, "with, Ah, bright wings," (as Gerard Manley Hopkins would have it). For what starts with distinctions ends with theories, and RR, like LW, is resolutely against *theories* in *philosophy*. Their home is at the ground level, in empirical theories of natural science. And "Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences." [TLP and PI.] Fun fact: this hostility to theory, in effect, to postulating theoretical entities (in Sellars's sense of using terms that one can only become entitled to apply *inferentially*) is the principal source of John McDowell's avowed affinity with Rorty.
- 4. This seems to "go too far." [Remarks on philosophers who "go too far."] On Rorty and "going too far."

Almost every one of his readers at some point thinks Rorty "goes too far." (I am no exception.)

But if we think about this fact a bit, it emerges that it is because Rorty is *relentlessly* drawing out the consequences of some lines of thought (e.g. that all normative statuses are matters of role in social practices, or that <u>representation</u> is inextricably bound up with epistemological commitments and programs we would no longer endorse). He follows the ideas where they go, even when that leads him to very radical skeptical doubts or proposals for revision.

Doing this is, whatever else it is, real philosophizing.

We should sort out (ideally, better than he does, because having what he ended up saying as our *starting* point—his *final* drafts as our *first* drafts) the concepts, considerations, and arguments he deploys. If he "goes too far"—as he almost certainly does—we should be very careful in assessing just *where* in what regards. The thing is to assess how much "go" (William James's phrase) there is to his underlying *redescriptions* of philosophical issues, the different vocabularies he recommends to assess them in.

Again: If what he says makes you angry, good: you just found not only a topic for your term paper, but a method, namely assessing just *where* he goes off the tracks.

C) Truth:

Under the heading of 'truth':

- 1. Two broad conceptions:
- a) Truth as "correspondence with reality."
- b) Truth as "what is best in the way of belief."

Brandom

"Correspondence with reality" in (a) is a modern, representationalist rendering of Aristotle's "saying of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not."

Rorty sees the Aristotelian formulation as a platitude, not colliding with James's (b).

2. Let us speak about the conception in (b).

It will have the consequences that:

- i) Normative statements, legal statements, hermeneutic statements can be *true*, just as OED statements can.
- ii) They are true in the very same sense that OED and natural scientific claims are.
- iii) They are *no less true*, in that sense, *every bit as true*, in that sense, as OED claims and scientific claims are.

This is *anti-bifurcationist assimilationism* about truth: treating all vocabularies as permitting the formulation of truths in the same sense and to the same degree. There are no fundamental distinctions of kind to be made among vocabularies, as far as their truth-evaluability is concerned.

The strategy here depends on a *universal declarativism* about truth. It says that whatever can be put in declarative sentences will admit of truth assessments of the very same sort.

"Pragmatism cuts across this transcendental/empirical distinction by questioning the common presupposition that there is an invidious distinction to be drawn between kinds of truths. For the pragmatist, true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry what sort of reality, if any, a given sentence corresponds to -no need to worry about what "makes" it true." [CP 4]

For pragmatists, "truth" is just the name of a property which all true statements share. Pragmatists doubt that there is much to be said about this common feature. [CP 1]

Pragmatists think that the history of attempts to isolate the True or the Good, or to define the word "true" or "good," supports their suspicion that there is no interesting work to be done in this area. It might, of course, have turned out otherwise... They might have found something interesting to say about the essence of Truth. But in fact they haven't... So pragmatists see the Platonic tradition as having outlived its usefulness. This does not mean that they have a new, non-Platonic set of answers to Platonic questions to offer, but rather that they do not think we should ask those questions any more... They would simply like to change the subject. [2]

My first characterization of pragmatism is that it is simply anti-essentialism applied to notions like "truth," "knowledge," "language," "morality," and similar objects of philosophical theorizing. [PRI 721]

Here we can ask: when one *says that* some claim (claimable) is true, is one *describing* it? A *substantive*, representationalist correspondence theory aims to answer "Yes."

Such a view aspires to an account of the nature of the representation relation that obtains between facts, truth-makers, paradigmatically *objective* ones, and the claim*ings* that are true. *One* way of defending a James-type (b) account, of the sort Rorty is espousing, is to say that in characterizing a claimable as true one is *not describing* it, one is *endorsing* it. That is doing something else.

This is *expressivism* about 'true' and 'truth'.

This kind of expressivism, though it is a *local* expressivism, gives aid and comfort to *global* Antirepresentationalism.

It is a merely *local* expressivism in that it concerns only the word 'true' and its cognates. But because 'true' can be applied to *all* declarative sentences, it is a *universal declarativism* about truth claims.

What is and deserves to be controversial is the *assimilation* of the sense of 'true' across different vocabularies, codified in (i)-(iii) above. This is *universal declarativism* about truth claims: putting all declaratives on a par as far as the sense of 'true' applicable to them is concerned. When combined with expressivism about 'true', the result is *promiscuous antibifurcationist assimilationism*, which is accordingly the product of *universal declarativism* and *local expressivism* about truth.

On this reading, in calling something 'true' one is not describing it (e.g. as "corresponding with" or "representing reality accurately.") One is doing something like *commending* it, *endorsing* it, *approving of* it.

This is taking up a *normative* stance towards it.

That is one reading of James's "what is good in the way of belief."

Saying a claimable is true is approving of it as good of its kind in the same way I can approve of a knife as good of its kind if it is sharp and has a comfortable, tractable handle, or a racehorse as good of its kind if it is fast relative to other horses over the right distance.

This is a way of understanding what Rorty means when he says that calling something 'true' is paying it an empty compliment that is appropriate to whatever portions of Quine's "web of belief" are currently stable, whatever planks of Neurath's boat we are currently leaving in place as not in need of repair.

That status is indeed available promiscuously across vocabularies that admit of declaratives: normative, legal, literary, and so on.

This deep connection between *pragmatist* and a certain kind of *expressivist* view about <u>truth</u> forges a connection to the second half of the course. Huw Price is the one who saw and developed this deep connection between *pragmatism* and *expressivism*.

It is that insight that allowed him to bring the avowed anti-pragmatist (certaingly, against *Rorty's* pragmatism) but important expressivist, much closer to the pragmatist fold.

3. Suppose we universally apply a representational picture of how declarative language works.

We can either do that even-handedly or invidiously.

If we do it even-handedly, we are committed to there being truth-makers for all sorts of declaratives: abstract, normative, modal....

If we do it invidiously, we say that some vocabularies represent well and others worse. (How does this affect assessment of *justication* of claims made in these vocabularies?)
The invidious application of the representational model requires a criterion of *bifurcation*.
That is why Rorty here is putting the emphasis on denying *distinctions* of semantic models—to begin with, between 'hard' empirical natural-scientific descriptions and 'soft' *Geisteswissenschaftlich* ones (along a dimension that has humanities at the far end, and social sciences arrayed in between).

4. But surely when I say "It is true that p," I don't just mean "I believe that p," even though (it is true that) they are co-assertible: it is *exactly* whenever I am justified or entitled to say the one that I am entitled to say the other—for *any* declarative.

Rorty says:

What really needs debate between the pragmatist and the intuitive realist is not whether we have intuitions to the effect that "truth is more than assertibility" or "there is more to pains than brainstates" or "there is a clash between modem physics and our sense of moral responsibility." *Of course* we have such intuitions. How could we escape having them? We have been educated within an intellectual tradition built around such claims-just as we used to be educated within an intellectual tradition built around such claims as "If God does not exist, everything is permitted," "Man's dignity consists in his link with a supernatural order," and "One must not mock holy things." But it begs the question between pragmatist and realist to say that we must find a philosophical view which "captures" such intuitions. The pragmatist is urging that we do our best to *stop having* such intuitions, that we develop a new intellectual tradition. [17-18]

I think we do *not* need to give up the intuition that there is more to truth than assertibility or justification, in order to accord with RR's fundamental insights.

A more nuanced view, responding to this complaint, is:

Social-perspectival account of the truth condition in attributions of knowledge on the minimal JTB account.

Consider what one is *doing* when one *attributes* knowledge to someone.

S: A knows that *p*.

According to the JTB account of minimal necessary conditions for knowledge,

S must be taking A:

- i. To believe that p
- ii. To be justified that p

iii. To believe that *p truly*.

(Put aside Gettier's considerations suggesting the need for a fourth condition concerning the *interaction* of the justification and the truth conditions. Can give a quick example.)

Thought of in terms of normative social practices, expressed in a suitable *normative pragmatic metavocabulary*:

in (i) S is *attributing* to A a discursive commitment that is propositionally contentful in the minimal declarativist sense: it can be expressed by a declarative sentence,

in (ii) S is attributing entitlement to that commitment to A,

But in (iii) what S is doing is not attributing any normative status to A.

Rather, S is *undertaking* commitment to that claimable herself.

On this normative, social-practical account, what makes *truth* such a peculiar *property*—if it is thought of as something one can *describe* a claimable as having—is that in asserting truth to another's claims one is not *attributing* anything to the other. One is committing *oneself*. It is this difference of social perspective, between *attributing* commitment or entitlement (belief or justification) to another, and *acknowledging* commitment oneself that is *mistaken* as the offering of a very peculiar *description* of another.

This difference of social perspective is collapsed in one's own case, which is what makes "It is true that p" inter-assertible not only with p but with "I believe that p."

But when we think about the *inter*personal case of *attributing* truth, we see how truth and belief come apart.

5. Further objection:

The expressivist equivalence of p and "it is true that p"—which is *not* an equivalence of p and "I believe that p" (that was the point just above)—applies only to *free-standing* assertions. This expressivism underwrites only an equivalence of *force*. But the Frege-Geach point reminds us that in saying "If it is true that p, then q," I have *not* endorsed or commended the claim that p. Yet the conditionals with "it is true that p" and p substituted as antecedents are still equivalent. This is the observation at the base of *minimalism* about 'true', of Paul Horwich's sort (downstream from Ramsey—one of Misak's arch-pragmatists)

What can the expressivist say about those *embedded* occurrences, in virtue of which the equivalence of *content* of p and 'It is true that p' is based?

Here disquotationalism in its most sophisticated prosentential form is the response.

Like Blackburnian expressivism about the 3 'M's, it takes the *primary*, content-conferring uses to be the free-standing ones, and then goes on to tell a story about the derivative embedded uses that appeal to the content conferred on the vocabulary by the free-standing uses.

[People should look at my "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth-Talk"—elaborated in more detail in Chapter Five of *MIE*—and "Explanatory vs. Expressive Deflationationism about Truth" [can be found on Bob's website under "Texts Available for Download"] for the details on how this story goes.)

D) Representation:

To say that the parts of properly analyzed true sentences are arranged in a way isomorphic to parts of the world paired with them sounds plausible if one thinks of a sentence like "Jupiter has moons." It sounds slightly less plausible for "The earth goes round the sun", less for "There is no such thing as natural motion", and not plausible at all for 'The universe is infinite." When we want to praise or blame assertions of the latter sort of sentence, we show how the decision to assert them fits into a whole complex of decisions about what terminology to use, what books to read, what projects to engage in, what life to live. In this respect resemble such sentences as "Love is the only law" and "History is the story of class struggle." The whole vocabulary of isomorphism, picturing, and mapping is out of place here, as indeed is the notion of being true of objects. If we ask what objects these sentences claim to be true of, we get only unhelpful repetitions of the subject terms - "the universe", "the law", "history". Or, even less helpfully we get talk about "the facts," or "the way the world is." [PRI 723]

- Two observations about this passage:
 - a) It seems to make a bifurcation between OED vocabulary, where representational talk does get a grip, and other kinds of talk where it does not.
 - On the face of it, this observation so far only underwrites a *local* Antirepresentationalism, that is, the denial of *global* representationalism. It is offering a reason for thinking that the representational model is not *universally* good, not a good model for meaning in general, because there are important cases that do not fit that model.
 - We could amplify this, line of thought by saying that nonetheless insisting on using this representational model globally must result in an unhappy choice:
 - i. Either postulate objects and properties that are represented by the sorts of claims Rorty points to—the rationalist policy of Sellars's "Metaphysicus."
 - ii. Or, read the distinction (bifurcation) *invidiously*, by treating the uses of language that do *not* fit the representational model as *defective* or *inferior* in some way.
 - b) The story about the *other* sorts of claims is in terms of the *reason relations* they stand in, their role in practices of giving and assessing reasons. Since they have perfectly definite roles in such practices, the thought is, it follows that they have perfectly good meanings. Any theory that denies that just shows its inadequacy.
 - I'll have more to say about this collision of the representational model of meaning with the inferential role model of meaning later on, in connection with what Rorty makes of Davidson.
 - 1. (Here use passages from "Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism, and Liberalism.")

By an antirepresentationalist account I mean one which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality. These papers argue that such an account makes it unnecessary to draw Dilthey-like distinctions between explaining "hard" phenomena and interpreting "soft" ones. They offer an account of inquiry which recognizes sociological, but not epistemological, differences between such disciplinary matrices as theoretical physics and literary criticism. [3]

I claim that the representationalism-vs.-antirepresentationalism issue is distinct from the realism-vs.-antirealism one, because the latter issue arises only for representationalists. [3]

This thought is the one Huw Price develops into the object-naturalism/subject-naturalism distinction. The former, but not the latter, presupposes representationalism.

But for Davidson...reflection on what a belief is is not "the analysis of representation." Rather, it is reflection on how a language-using organism interacts with what is going on its neighborhood. Like Dewey, Davidson takes off from Darwin rather than from Descartes: from beliefs as adaptations to the environment rather than as quasi-pictures. [7]

This last phrase is a reminder that "coping" is a term meant to invoke Darwinian selectional adaptational talk. We can ask how literally to take this trope. There is a reductive reading of it as in "evolutionary psychology" (an extremely suspect *Fach*). This reductive reading makes survival, or more exactly, reproductive success, the ultimate setter of normative standards. On this account, "coping" is a learning-evolutionary notion. (Think of the story about the role of these selectional processes in Peircean pragmatism.)

2. But this reductive version is not the only one. Though Rorty is sometimes tempted by it rhetorically, it is not his considered view. You can see that it is not by his rejection of Dewey's instrumentalist view of language as tool, essentially for the right reasons (as I would have it).

The point about what is wrong with the Deweyan "language is the tool of tools" metaphor applies here, too.

10. RR does acknowledge the crucial limitation on the Deweyan "language as tool" view. He says:

This Davidsonian way of looking at language lets us avoid hypostatising Language in the way in which the Cartesian epistemological tradition, and particularly the idealist tradition which built upon Kant, hypostatised Thought. For it lets us see language not as a *tertium quid* between Subject and Object, nor as a medium in which we try to form pictures of reality, but as part of the behaviour of human beings. On this view, the activity of uttering sentences is one of the things people do in order to cope with their environment.

The Deweyan notion of language as tool rather than picture is right as far as it goes. But we must be careful *not* to phrase this analogy so as to suggest that one can separate the tool, Language, from its users and inquire as to its "adequacy" to achieve our purposes. The latter

suggestion presupposes that there is some way of breaking out of language in order to compare it with something else. [CP 6]

That view is often attributed to LW, though he does *not* say this. He uses the variety of tools as a model for the variety of uses of linguistic expressions, but that is not the same thing. Dewey's slightly more considered phrase is that language is the "tool of tools." Presumably, that is a tool for producing (and assessing, deploying...) tools: a second-order tool. But even that is wrong, for what is it a tool to do? *Not* just produce first-order tools for a fixed set of purposes. It produces purposes to apply tools to every bit as much as the tools themselves.

Argument: The instrumental model of normative assessment as good or better or worse *as* a means to an end—does not *in principle* apply to language.

For that model requires that the *end* can be specified *independently of* and *antecedently to* the means being considered to achieve it, and that one can assess success at achieving that end without having to consider *how* it was achieved (the means employed).

And a central, essential function of language is precisely to enable the consideration of *novel* ends, ends one cannot have except by talking about them.

That's why your dog can't aim at eliminating poverty or restructuring the international monetary system.

It points the way to a non-reductive alternative reading of "coping" in terms of vocabularies. It is critical that the standards of how well a vocabulary is "coping" must come from *within* some vocabulary.

"Coping" is deploying reason-relations in a practice of giving and assessing reasons. This is what Davidsonian interpretivism puts first in the order of explanation.

(And has immediate holist consequences, not only within semantics, but—the second "barrel" of the "double-barreled holism") at the subdisciplinary metalevel of the relations between semantics and epistemology. There epistemology is thought of as comprising not just the study of *knowledge*, but the study of *understanding*.

This holism we see in Quine's TDE rejection of language/theory, meaning/belief distinctions, and in Dummett's treating <u>meaning</u> and <u>understanding</u> as coordinate concepts. Understanding is just grasp of meaning; meaning is what is grasped in understanding. (Note that this involves treating meanings as intermediaries between subjects and what they understand. Subjects understand *by* grasping meanings. There is a worry about an analog of "veil-of-ideas" skepticism raising its ugly head here.)

On this way of thinking about things, it is the collision between reason-relations interpretivism on the side of justification, and causal (necessarily atomistic?) stories that does the antirepresentationalist work.

Ruth Millikan is the one in our generation (well, mine) who has most made selectional models of norms (one notion of 'coping') work in thinking about discursive practices—and so is the truest heir to Peirce, as I understand his use of the selectional structure common to evolution and

learning as the key to both a reconceived empiricism and (the part where most of his readers think *he* "goes too far.") a reconceived naturalism.

3. Another related contrast with <u>representation</u> is the Dummett account of the conception of the explanatory role *meanings* play—codifying proprieties of *use*—that leads to the later Wittgenstein's semantic *nihilism*.

The trouble with the later Wittgenstein, Dummett says, is that he cannot "supply us with a *foundation* for future work in the philosophy of language or in philosophy in general." Wittgenstein gave us no "systematic theory of meaning," and hence nothing on which to build. Indeed, he thought such a theory impossible, since (in Dummett's words) he rejected his earlier view that "the meanings of our sentences are given by the conditions that render them determinately true or false" and substituted the view that "meaning is to be explained in terms of what is taken as *justifying* an utterance." This latter view is typical of antirepresentationalist philosophers, for their concern is to eliminate what they regard as representationalism's pseudo-problems, rather than to build systems or to solve problems. [3]

This passage is an invitation for me to rehearse Dummett's take on LW, as seeing <u>meaning</u> as a theoretical object-kind, postulated to codify proprieties of practice. (Justification is just the one Dummett—and I—want to focus on. We are rationalists, LW is not. He is a pragmatist-pluralist.)

And LW thinks postulational techniques are *in principle* inappropriate in philosophy. (I think he is wrong, but this is *one* methodological commitment that is at issue between a certain kind of pragmatist and others.)

Bracketing that issue, LW thinks that because language (discursive practice) is i) a motley, and ii) plastic-protean (H-J Schneider on "projection"), no such codification is possible. So he is a semantic skeptic or nihilist.

LW thinks that language is a *motley* (cf. the tool comparison: besides glue and nails, measuring devices, pencils, levels, toolbelts...). But, more seriously (as per Hans-Julius Schneider), language is plastic and protean. There might just be no prospect of codifying anything beyond a temporary, fragile, evanescent time-slice of discursive practice. (Cf. RR quoting with approval Hegel's historicist take on philosophy as "capturing one's time in thought." [In Intro to *CP*.]) Note that it does not follow that this is not worth doing. (Cf. LW's reminder that not all declarative sentences are in the business of stating facts, not all singular terms are in the business of picking out particulars—but then *not* telling us how some expression needs to be used to *be* in those lines of work.) But one can*not* use such an account in the service of a Kantian (and Platonic) project of theoretically codifying *all possible vocabularies*, and so sitting in epistemic judgment on all discursive attempts to understand.

4. The later Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, for exemple, would all be as dubious about the notion of "truth-makers" — nonlinguistic items which "render" statements determinately true or false — as they are about that of "representation." For representationalists, "making true" and "representing" are reciprocal relations: the nonlinguistic item which makes *S* true is the one represented by *S*. But

antirepresentationalists see both notions as equally unfortunate and dispensable — not just in regard to statement of some disputed class, but in regard to all statements. [4]

David Armstrong is the great fan of looking for "truth-makers." They are to be specified in the base vocabulary (for him, natural scientific or physicalist), for sentences from the target vocabulary. (His student Frank Jackson's "location problems" are his version of this idea.) This is "object naturalism," Rorty's "realism."

it is no truer that "atoms are what they are because we use 'atom' as we do" than that "we use 'atom' as we do because atoms are as they are." *Both* of these claims, the antirepresentationlist says, are entirely empty. Both are pseudo-explanations. It is particularly important that the antirepresentationalist insist that the *latter* claim is a pseudo-explanation. [5]

This is a particularly telling way of putting the point: that

- i. we use 'atom' as we do because atoms are as they are is *no truer* (no more true) than that
- ii. the atoms are as they are because of how we use 'atom.'

Here one wants to say: But Fodor is *right* that there are "one-way counterfactual-supporting dependencies between atoms and 'atom's." And surely those constrain our use of 'atom.'

I think Rorty would reply that this observation is correct, but that it addresses only causally necessary conditions for our practices to be as they are (compare *standing* necessary conditions for that, such as the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere). The *justification* of our claims is another matter. Assessments of the *correctness* of 'atom'-claims are moves in our social practices of giving and asking for reasons. Those practices are made possible, *inter alia*, by those "one-way dependences," but only in the way they are made possible by our bodies being as they are and contingencies concerning observational opportunities.

If that *is* his response, then it relies *heavily* on the Kantian causes-norms (reasons) distinction, the distinction that becomes Hegel's *Natur/Geist* distinction between what we would make explicit using *alethic modal* vocabulary (e.g.: tracking correlations between atoms and 'atoms') and what we would make explicit using *deontic normative* vocabulary (assessments of correctness, of justification, of evidentiary entitlement).

5. One component of Rorty's pragmatism is his *pragmatism about norms*: the claim that normative statuses are always and everywhere *social* statuses, a matter of the role some person or performance, or state of a person plays in social practices (with all *their* contingencies).

On an antirepresentationalist view, it is one thing to say that a prehensile thumb, or an ability to use the word "atom" as physicists do, is useful for coping with the environment. It is another thing to attempt to *explain* this utility by reference to representationalist notions, such as the notion that the reality referred to by "quark" was "determinate" before the word "quark" came along (whereas that referred to by, for example, "foundation grant" only jelled once the relevant social practices emerged). [5]

Here I suspect RR is denying something he should not—that we can explain why the practices we have are as successful as they are in "coping," along some dimensions of coping, in terms of alethic modally formulatable relations. If he is going astray here, it is because he is focusing on determinacy (I would say, "determinateness"), rather than justification.

Lewis thus builds representationalism into the "face value" of physics. '4 This is characteristic of representationalists who are realists rather than skeptics. For they see physics as the area of culture where nonhuman reality, as opposed to human social practices, most obviously gets its innings. The representationalist believes, in Williams's words, that "we can select among our beliefs and features of our world picture some that we can reasonably claim to represent the world in a way to the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities".'5 By contrast, antirepresentationalists see no sense in which physics is more independent of our human peculiarities than astrology or literary criticism.[6]

RR picked astrology because it is false.

Here it seems relevant to consider Harman's version, contrasting moral values and atoms. The best explanation of our 'atom'-talk is that atoms are a certain way, and their being that way is systematically (subjunctively robustly) affecting our talk.

By contrast, the best explanation of our moral-value-talk need appeal only to our moral *attitudes*, that is, in effect, to other bits of our talk.

This distinction Rorty wants to deny. And there is considerable go to that impulse to deny it.

I should

- a) try to say what is wrong with the Harman argument,
- b) use that to articulate Rorty's point here, and then
- c) see what sorts of concessions can be made to the explicability of necessary 'causal' (modal) conditions of the variable success of our practices in "coping" without undercutting the claims in (a) and (b).

Rhetorically, I can present his argument in the starkest terms, as in the passage above, inviting outrage, and then finding a real point behind it.

For (a), the Harman argument depends on realism=object-naturalism. That is, it depends on requiring that what is represented by talk of moral values (cf. Blackburnian expressivism about the 3 'M's) must be *located* w/res to *descriptions* of the world in *physicalist* vocabulary, that *truth-makers* must be found for moral claims that are specifiable in such a naturalistic vocabulary. This is not an *argument* for representationalism. It is extracting *consequences* from a naturalistically-physicalistically *reductive* representationalism.

(Here there is an analogy with what goes wrong with Kripke's argument in the Kripkenstein book. But that would probably be too involved and go too far afield to help me rhetorically.)

This brings us to (b). A Rortyan-Pricean pragmatism will invoke attitudes for *both* cases: atoms and moral values. Price will warn against "bifurcationism."

So we are focusing here on the problem area we will be addressing in the whole second half of the course: local or global expressivism, and the relation of arguments for either to representationalism, which forces naturalism into the *object*-naturalism mold.

Rorty is interested in blocking the claim that we are and must be, *in principle, less justified* in our claims about moral values, beauty, the character of the innovation of a literary text—or that our justification for (entitlement to) making such claims is of a *different*, *inferior*, second-class kind, *because* these claims are *not* representing-tracking the *facts*, are not accurate

descriptions of them. He points out that these claims depend on representationalist and objectnaturalist reductionist metaconceptual commitments that are optional.

To what extent are there procedures for resolving disagreements? And what are they like. Compare: law and jurisprudential disagreements. Empirical disciplines can outrun the natural sciences.

I should argue sequentially:

- Might try out the idea, as I do above, that we *can* licitly invoke subjunctively robust tracking relations to *explain* the success of some coping strategies, but *cannot* invoke them to *justify* claims, or say why some are more justified than others. This would be using the Kant causes/reasons (alethic/deontic) distinction.
- But the Harman argument is of exactly the form that (a) would allow, and it is clear that Rorty is (properly, I want to say) objecting to just that sort of argument.

And Davidsonian triangulation is raising a variant of the Harman argument, but from *within* the vocabulary of the interpreter—onto which the interpreted vocabulary is mapped. It will arise wherever we invoke causal relations to shared objects *in our interpretations*. But the response to Harman argument on RR's behalf does seem apt here, too.

Diagnosis: collision between normative reason-relations top-down holistic order of explanation and representational relations bottom-up atomistic order of explanation.

The most general lesson of the discussion of Davidson is that the overall collision is between the intrinsically holistic demands, from above, of reason-relations, understood in interpretivist terms by DD, and (also) in social-practical terms by RR, on the one hand, and the claims, from below, of representational relations determined *independently of social practices of giving and assessing reasons*, for instance (and paradigmatically) by objective, causal relations *describable* in alethic modal terms.

Davidson is happy to impute extensions (referents) as an *intermediate stage* of interpretation. But he insists that the process be top-down,

- a) Starting with the reason-relations in terms of which reasons are practically given and assessed.
- b) Moving, partly by triangulation, to assignments of referents to singular terms and extensions to properties,
- c) Which assignments are then tested by using them recursively, to generate readings for all the utterables that have not been uttered (using his turn-Tarski's-truth-theory-on-its-head notion of <u>recursive truth theories</u> as theories of meaning).

Both ends of this process are holistic attributions of systems of reason-relations (material implications and incompatibilities) that say *in detail* just how the ones interpreted are *coping* with their non-discursive environment and each other. It is that holistic system of reason-

relations that provides both the raw materials and the ultimate criteria of adequacy for the assessment of the imputed representational relations that are postulated along the way in constructing the recursive truth-theory.

It is this picture that is being contrasted with an *atomistic, bottom-up* representationalist order of semantic (and epistemological) explanation, which seeks to begin with *objective* atomistic representation relations between objects and singular terms and properties and predicates. These are "objective" in being independent of and settled antecedently to the *attitudes* (e.g. beliefs) of the practitioners, and the reason-relations they *take* to hold among their claimables. Those reference (representation) relations provide a standard for normative assessment of the attempts at justification undertaken by the practitioners themselves. This picture is what Rorty is most concerned to reject.

And Rorty elsewhere [where?] makes an argument that turns on just this way of thinking of things. He argues that objective (e.g. causal) theories of reference are committed to there being a *bright line*, determined objectively by causal, attitude-independent relations (between horses and 'horses'), between

- α) Referring to actual objects and properties, but having almost completely false beliefs about them, and
- β) Having *such* false beliefs that they do not manage to hook on referentially to any actual objects and properties.

But, he argues, there is no such line.

The assessment of which is the better way to understand, say 'phlogiston' (as a bad theory about oxygen, or just as postulating something that does not exist—and can have "negative weight") answers holistically to constraints concerning the reason-relations the bits of vocabulary stand in to one another.

Such assessments are *pragmatic* in a low sense of answering to our needs and interests in making the assessment.

Here is a passage that offers some confirmation of this reading:

"Let me sum up by offering a third and final characterization of pragmatism: it is the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones -- no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers." [PRI 726]

Suppose we universally apply a representational picture of how declarative language works. We can either do that even-handedly or invidiously.

If we do it even-handedly, we are committed to there being truth-makers for all sorts of declaratives: abstract, normative, modal....

If we do it invidiously, we say that some vocabularies represent well and others worse. (How does this affect assessment of *justication* of claims made in these vocabularies?)

The invidious application of the representational model requires a criterion of *bifurcation*. That is why Rorty here is putting the emphasis on denying *distinctions* of semantic models—to begin with, between 'hard' empirical natural-scientific descriptions and 'soft' *Geisteswissenschaftlich* ones (along a dimension that has humanities at the far end, and social sciences arrayed in between).

My inclination is to try to botanize *various* distinctions between the practices governing the use of different kinds of declaratives:

- i) Empirical vs. nonempirical. Here what is distinctive is the role played by noninferentially acquired judgings. Here we should think of Quine's behavioral characterization of them: they are widely agreed upon under conditions of "concurrent stimulation." Here there is a gradation, with 'square' or 'red' (importantly different) at one end, and 'mu-meson' at the other. Here the factors affecting *how* widely shared the RDRDs are include at least background theory (some people can observe witches, only some can observe Toltec potsherds), instruments (bubble chambers), and training. Further, these observations must play a distinctive role in justification of claims and the settling of disputes regarding incompatible claims.
- ii) Theoretical vs. nontheoretical. (Sellars emphasizes this.) To what extent is the postulation of entities such that interlocutors can only be entitled to claims about them inferentially, as the products of inferential processes.
- iii) Institutionalization. Law is a prime example. Legal vocabularies are deployed in legal institutions, their use is held in place by routinized, regimented procedures that are carefully taught and policed. Differential diagnosis in medicine is like this, too. There is an institutionalized set of practices for resolving disputes about the proper applicability of legal concepts. Note that here there are *not* events playing roles close to that of observation reports.
 - The case of law is especially significant, I think, because the vocabulary applied (using declarative sentences) is principally and essentially a *normative* vocabulary. Legal institutions are specifically required to and charged with moving from 'is' to 'ought.' Here the distinction between "rules in force" and "facts of the case" is part of what is institutionally held in place.
- iv) Moving out from the specifically linguistic, think of cases where there are relatively objective (attitude-independent) procedures for determining who is better (as we want to say, "technically") playing chess, or tennis, playing the violin, running fast....
- v) Within the high culture (the part of the culture that aims specifically at *understanding* us), the character of the *objects* of study, or the nature of the *discipline*. Cf. people asking whether religious studies, or anthropology, or economics, or philosophy is a *field* or a *discipline*. The former is unified by the *objects* addressed, the latter by the *methods* used to address them. Ideally there is a harmony between them, but sometimes one side is used to *define* the other—on the assumption that the objects *call for* a certain kind of method to study or understand them, or that the method is *appropriate* for some objects and not others. Note that here "objects of study" need *not* be thought of in terms of what some vocabulary *represents* rather than what that vocabulary seeks to *cope* with.

At one point, Rorty calls distinctions like these "sociological, but not epistemological."

In these two passages, Rorty recharacterizes a central bifurcation he wants to deny, and allows that we can understand in pragmatic terms the rough-and-ready phenomenon that is being mistakenly erected into a fundamental distinction of kind:

The opposition between mortal vocabularies and immortal propositions is reflected in the opposition between the inconclusive comparison and contrast of vocabularies (with everybody trying to *aufheben* everybody else's way of putting everything) characteristic of the literary culture, and rigorous argumentation-the procedure characteristic of mathematics, what Kuhn calls "normal" science, and the law (at least in the lower courts). [CP 29]

d) <u>Development of Rorty's Thought Towards his Pragmatism</u>:

At very end [if there is time], can tell the Rorty origin story from "An Arc of Thought." (Might mention that gluttons for punishment can listen to me giving this lecture in German, on the "Video and Audio" page of my website.)

Describe his eliminative materialism and how I conjecture it led him to think about the relations between ontology and social practices, so as to arrive at pragmatism about normativity, and its application to ontological commitments.